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History repeating itself, former CIA agent says

By ERNESTINE WILLIAMS
News-Press Staff Writer

When former CIA agent Ralph McGehee reviews U.S. involvement in Central America, he says he sees a replay of the activities that preceded the Vietnam War.

"There are many similarities," he said Friday in Fort Myers. "The gradual introduction of advisers into the area. The advisers will get killed and then you have to justify it; you can't let them die in vain. More troops go in and ultimately, the whole area becomes a military war."

McGehee, 58, spoke at the Airport Ramada Hotel during a luncheon of the Lee County Coalition for Peace. The gathering is part of a series of activities during Central American Information Week in Florida, April 6-13.

The proposed \$100 million package of U.S. aid for the contras includes sending military advisers to train the contras, McGehee said.

"It's just sort of a creepy escalation that ended up in the (Vietnam) war that cost us ultimately approximately \$500 billion and the deaths of 58,000 Americans," he said.

The threat of communism "has been the traditional excuse" for aid to foreign countries that the U.S. wants to control, he said.

"Sometimes its a red herring, sometimes there's reality behind it," he said. "But I think that via our policies we've forced the Sandanistas to go to the Soviet Union for their weaponry. And now we can say they are in alignment with the Soviets."

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lations with the Sandanistas, they wouldn't have gone to the Soviets, he said. U.S. officials don't want to assist Central American governments in becoming independent, he said.

"We have traditionally created the governments down there and controlled them," he said. "We created the Somoza government and it was very responsive to all the policies that we wanted to implement."

It's a matter of economics, McGehee said. U.S.-based corporations can take their business to repressive governments that don't allow social equity programs, such as labor unions. There they produce goods at a fraction of the cost they would incur in the United States, he said.

McGehee, who spent 25 years in the CIA until 1977, wrote "Deadly Deceits," which details CIA activities in Central America. A second book about the CIA is in the works, he said.

"A major part of (the CIA's) covert action role is misinformation, and the American people are the primary target of its lies," he said.

The contra program was established because the Nicaraguan government was supplying weapons to Salvadoran leftists, he said. But much of the information on the weapon supply is contrived through deceptive operations, such as fake shipments of weapons, he said.

"Whenever you want to overturn or support another government, you're going to have a communist weapon shipment. If you can't find one, you plant one and make arrangements for its discovery and then use that as an excuse for your policy," he said. "That's sort of an inviable rule and I've seen this happen over and over again in Central America."

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